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Country note**

Paraguay

Summary

The Executive Director presents the country note for Paraguay for a programme of cooperation for the period 2002 to 2006.

The situation of children and women

1. Paraguay is a small landlocked country of 407,000 square kilometres, bordered by Argentina, Bolivia and Brazil. The majority of the 5.4 million inhabitants, of whom 47 per cent are under the age of 18, share a hispano-indigenous culture. Some 40 per cent speak only an indigenous language. The census, however, identifies only 1 per cent of the population as indigenous. The indigenous tend to be the most excluded, with higher rates of poverty, mortality and illiteracy.

2. Economic growth in the 1990s was based largely on construction of the Itaipú hydroelectric scheme, and on primary commodities such as cotton, which are experiencing long-term depressed prices. In addition, Paraguay's acceptance of MERCOSUR trading bloc regulations largely ended the informal trade with Argentina and Brazil of cheap consumer electronics, liquor and cigarettes. This is now widely considered to be exhausted as an engine of growth, and Paraguay entered into a serious recession in late 1998. Poverty rates have increased substantially, to 26.7 per cent in urban areas and 42 per cent in rural areas, and some 45 per cent of the workforce is only marginally employed.

* E/ICEF/2001/2.

** An addendum to the present report containing the final country programme recommendation will be submitted to the Executive Board for approval at its second regular session of 2001.

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3. Paraguay endured nearly two centuries of authoritarian rule. This pattern of governance favoured centralized control, and power was largely in the hands of men. Economic activity has long focused on the accumulation of wealth and privilege by small influential groups. These factors underlie Paraguay's unequal economic distribution: the richest 20 per cent receive 62.4 per cent of national income, and the poorest 10 per cent receive just 0.7 per cent. Nonetheless, the democratization process in Paraguay begun in the 1990s offers the possibility of allowing increased participation in a more democratic and egalitarian society. The national decentralization policy and the increased importance of civil society in social policy dialogue — especially groups advocating children's and women's issues — are positive developments.

4. Following the political opening in 1990, Paraguay ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The 1990s saw the gradual adoption by the Government of international norms and practices. The Government's 1998 report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child noted that the country had reformed legislation and regulations affecting women and children, including a law regulating the formerly active market in international adoptions (a law that serves as a model in the region). The Code on Children and Adolescents, now pending final congressional approval, is also expected to have a positive impact by harmonizing disparate and conflicting laws and creating an entity to oversee sectoral policies. The 1998 report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child will be reviewed in mid-2001.

5. Government efforts in the 1990s have significantly improved many child indicators, including several goals of the World Summit for Children. The infant mortality rate (IMR) declined from 30 per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 19 per 1,000 in 1998; the under-five mortality rate declined from 40 per 1,000 to 25; and the maternal mortality rate (MMR) declined from 341 per 100,000 live births to 187 (still very high). Net primary school enrolment is 94 per cent. The Government has also established mechanisms to take action in social sector areas now emerging as a priority, for example creation of the Secretariat for Women, the Secretariat for the Environment and the National Adoption Centre. Education sector reform is under way, with progress in primary retention rates and coverage of pre-school services.

6. Despite these successes, there is unfinished business from the end-decade goals, and additional challenges in the New Global Agenda for Children. A life cycle analysis shows continuing needs in the areas of ensuring a healthy start to life, especially breastfeeding, micronutrients and effective access to health services; ensuring equal access to education, especially in terms of quality; and ensuring adolescent protection and participation (HIV/AIDS prevention, special protection measures, reduction of intra-family violence and elimination of child labour). Further progress is also needed in the area of democratic empowerment, and particularly in decentralization of administration and resources. Legislative protection of child rights needs continued advocacy, as does the effective implementation of these laws.

7. Disparities also remain a serious problem: IMR and MMR among indigenous peoples, for example, are estimated to be more than double the national average, with the most marginalized groups suffering rates double those for indigenous peoples overall. Further progress is also required with respect to micronutrient

nutrition and breastfeeding; immunization against tetanus; water supply, and especially sanitation; and education with respect to quality and delayed enrolment. HIV/AIDS prevalence remains quite low, approximately 1,500 cases, but preventive actions are required to avert a rapid increase.

8. Too often, laudable laws and policies are not put into practice. Therefore, further progress will require effective implementation. More use should be made of participatory programming processes, advocacy and subnational programming, to ensure that child rights are a major focus for all development partners. It is also clear that social sector spending must be better targeted. Paraguay is far from meeting its 20/20 Initiative goal: just 14.5 per cent of the budget is spent on basic social services. Further, much of the recent increases in social sector spending has been in recurrent costs, such as teacher salaries. While this keeps experienced staff in the system, it does not expand access or improve supplies and infrastructure.

Lessons learned from past cooperation

9. As a result of the current programme and the mid-term review of the 1995-1999 programme of cooperation, several lessons can be identified. First, even though supporting basic services delivery in communities empowers residents to demand their rights, this strategy disperses, or "atomizes", the effort of the country programme and prevents wide-scale impact with the resource levels available. Second, the Government acknowledges the need for UNICEF support in analysing and effectively implementing social policies. Third, more advocacy is needed to achieve a better allocation of government resources to ensure access to basic services. Fourth, further efforts are needed to ensure a gender perspective in social programmes, to better address the needs of girls and women, and to make use of the emerging power and influence of women's organizations. Fifth, despite the tentative decentralization policies that began in late 1998, governors and municipal authorities are embracing their roles as local advocates and have become a political-administrative base upon which subnational programming can proceed more effectively. Sixth, the country programme should help strengthen the relationship of families and communities to local government, by creating awareness and demand for fulfilment of rights, while strengthening the capacity of authorities to listen and respond. The programme should also help strengthen the capacity of families to analyse their problems, to take action to improve their situation, and to avoid intra-family violence and abuse. Finally, it is clear that greater coordination between donors and governmental partners on the one hand, and non-governmental actors and civil society organizations on the other, is key to strengthening democratic processes and ensuring effective participation in development, especially of adolescents and women.

10. Based on the above, the comparative advantage of UNICEF lies in advocating a more equitable and effective use of state resources, in mobilization and coordination of partners and allies, and in demand creation and capacity-building within families, rather than in direct delivery of basic services.

Proposed country programme strategy

11. Over the next 10 to 15 years, the Government and UNICEF will work to make the best interest of the child a basic consideration in all actions of the State and society, and promote the development of a culture of respect for child rights within the context of a democratic society.

12. Specific objectives of the 2002-2006 country programme include implementing the pending Code on Children and Adolescents; consolidating democratic institutions with a focus on child rights, especially at subnational levels; developing national public policies which include an equitable distribution of public expenditure to cover basic social services (the 20/20 Initiative); promoting a civil society capable of recognizing, practicing and defending child rights; strengthening Paraguayan families and communities to provide a better context in which child rights are recognized and practised; and reducing disparities and social inequities.

13. Strategies to build on the comparative advantages of UNICEF include: mobilizing and strengthening different actors and different levels of society (national, departmental, municipal and community); establishing a national consensus on the rights of children and women, putting into practice laws and regulations to promote and safeguard their rights; advocating and facilitating the effective participation of communities in local governance in order to respond to the rights of children to enjoy basic social services and protection; generating and mobilizing demand for social services through civil society networks; and empowering Paraguayan families through formal education, and mass media and interpersonal communication strategies.

14. The country programme will pursue its objectives through two programmes: the *child rights and public policy programme* will focus on establishing child rights as a central element of all public social policy. Nationally, the programme will seek to ensure that children's and women's rights are recognized and fulfilled, that service delivery and rights-monitoring systems are strengthened or established, and that the 20/20 Initiative is implemented. At the local level, institutional knowledge and capacity concerning children's and women's rights will be enhanced, particularly through the new Municipal Departments for Children. Another important intervention is improvement of local capacity to plan and implement activities to benefit children and women (including municipal plans of action), to monitor key rights indicators, and to help develop an effective referral system for children and women whose rights are abused. To these ends, technical assistance will be provided to strengthen selected institutions, especially to improve planning, monitoring and evaluation capacity.

15. The *community empowerment and basic social services programme* will seek to benefit poor and excluded families and their communities, especially indigenous children and women and monolingual Guarani speakers. Efforts will focus on advocacy and training, to help build the capacity of counterparts to deliver more appropriate and user-friendly services to the poorest and most vulnerable children and women. Support will also be provided for the design and dissemination of materials, and the implementation of social mobilization activities, to help create a more informed and vocal demand for services. Special attention will be given to making health, education and social services more culturally accessible and appropriate to excluded elements of the population. Other interventions will include

research to identify successful models, and to make this information available to the departmental and national level for replication. Substantive areas of focus will include perinatal infant mortality, early childhood care and development, maternal health, breastfeeding and micronutrient malnutrition, water and sanitation, primary health care, and quality primary education.

16. Finally, cross-sectoral costs will support programme-wide planning, monitoring and evaluation, for mobilization of other resources, and for administrative support required for all programmes.

17. UNICEF activities will be closely coordinated with United Nations agencies and other donors. The Common Country Assessment/United Nations Development Assistance Framework process began in June 2000, and United Nations theme groups have been working for some time in HIV/AIDS and health. UNICEF also cooperates closely with other donors, including the United States Agency for International Development (in health and strengthening of local government), the Spanish Cooperation Agency (in primary health care and water and sanitation activities), and the European Community (in child protection activities). Finally, UNICEF collaborates with non-governmental organizations (NGOs); some 50 per cent of UNICEF programme funds in 1997-2000 were spent on activities with NGOs. Partners include Radda Barnen in rights promotion and child participation and protection, Defense for Children International in juvenile justice, Plan International in education, and various national NGOs.

Estimated programme budget

Estimated programme cooperation, 2002-2006[a]

(In thousands of United States dollars)

	Regular resources	*Other resources*	*Total*
Child rights and public policy	900	1 025	1 925
Community empowerment and basic social services	1 300	1 200	2 500
Cross-sectoral costs	1 180	800	1 980
Total	**3 380**	**3 025**	**6 405**

[a] These are indicative figures only which are subject to change once aggregate financial data are finalized.